The Problem of Right & Wrong

Sept. 25, 1938

THE PROBLEM OF RIGHT AND WRONG.

1 Thess.5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

INTRO. The very revolt of the present age against all past standards and restrictions, and the consequent confusion of the world of thought and conduct today has not only set ablaze the problem of right and wrong but has made it absolutely necessary for our well-being that we have a clear-cut ~~conception of the~~ moral perception with definite principles for personal guidance.

Never was Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians more applicable than today-"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

Since the World War the German mark, the French franc, the English pound and the American dollar have fluctuated in value. Likewise our standards of conduct have been re-evaluated. Those of yesterday are in the discard and the mass of new laws and regulations, untried and uncertain, present a picture of confusion that reminds us of the game of croquet in which nothing~~s~~ stayed put, as told by the author of Alice in Wonderland. Describe it. Nothing would stay put.

Most people desire to do what is right, but nowadays it is most difficult to understand just what is right.

The philosophy of the new freedom says,"Obey that impulse, let yourself go." Away with inhibitions and suppressions. Let yourself have full expression. Now dont blame the young people for this. This philosophy did not originate with them. It was given to them by the older groups and the young people are merely its victims.

Even the churches have contributed to the present confusion. They have been emphasizing worship, ritualism, belief with no or very little attempt to relate worship to daily living. Worship is not an end in itself it should be a means to the end of right living. Jesus emphasized conduct as the real test of religion. A man's faith should have a powerful influence upon the way he lives. Without that, religion, however beautiful and impressive its ritual and worship, is hollow, a mere tinkling of cymbals.

Again, morality is often mistaken for custom and tradition. Customs and traditions change with the changing times. In styles we've gone from whoop skitts and sweeper skirts to hardly any at all. In lighting custom, we've gone from candles and kerosese lamps to electricity.

Many regard morality the same way. It is a mere matter of custom, subject to change. What was right yesterday is wrong today. and what is regarded as right today by the majority must be right.

And back of all this is the desire to do as we please without any interference. That was the conception of liberty of our first colonists who rebelled against the interference of the mother country. Nor does our age like to submit to a master. We rebel against codes and creeds. We are trying to live undisciplined lives. And when we get into trouble we run to the psychiatrist or to the doctor to get straightened out, or we run into the toils of the law.

Forthermore, we kid ourselves along with the prevailing belief that nothing is permanent, that everything is subject to change. Scientific theories change. Educational methods are not the same as they once were. Political, economic and social procedures are constantly fluctuating. Then why should'nt our ethical standards be subject to the same law of change?

But hold on, there is another side to this matter of change that we must ever bear in mind. The phenomena concerning which our scientific theories are ever changchanging are governed by laws which act independently of whatever theory we may hold in regard to them. When all the world believed that the earth was flat, that did not make it so. Our perception and understanding of truth and fact may change, but truth and fact are unalterable. There are some things which are final no matter what our opinions of them may be. The multiplication arithmetic table, for instance. The laws of the moral world are just as immutable as the laws of the physical universe. No matter how we try to hood-wink ourselves, there stands before us an eternal standard of right and wrong. Disobey the moral laws of life and they will break you. Otherwise this world would be a madhouse and living would be impossible. Integrity and morality are essential to the very existance of civilization.

But how can one know what is right and what is wrong? Are there reliable tests to determine the right or wrong of the situations we are called upon to face? Let me give you four tests which I believe are always reliable .

I. The test of experience

II. The test of publicity-would you be willing to have the whole world know of your decision? Your mother or father? The police?
Evil covets secrecy. Right is never ashamed of the light.

III. The test of Universality.
Soppose your personal decision should become a universal custom? Would it be for the good of all?
Take gambling, i.e. Suppose everybody gambled, would it make the world better?
Our lives act and react upon others. We cant live unto ourselves alone.

IV. Test your decision by the standards of Jesus.

What would Jesus do?
We know his principles and attitudes.

The burglar who robbed an apartment, caught by the one clew- his fingerprint on the statue of Hoffman's Christ.
Life is either condemned or justified by the standards of Jesus.

CONCLUSION. We cant trifle with the fundamental laws of the universe. Physical and moral laws are eternal. God has provided mankind with the means of finding out how to live rightly. Lasting happiness is found in that way of living.